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Saigon Official Says Constitution Is Flexible If Hanoi Is Serious

Washington Post Foreign Service

UNITED NATIONS, Sept. 24 — South Vietnamese Foreign Minister Tran Van Lam said today that if Hanoi would seriously discuss elections at the Paris peace talks, the constitution could be amended.

"We can revise our laws," Lam told correspondents at a luncheon. "Constitutions are made by men. We're quite ready."

One provision of the constitution is that presidential elections are to be held four years apart, meaning the next vote is scheduled for 1971. It has been suggested before that Saigon might advance the election date to facilitate a peace settlement. Another provision prohibits Communists and neutralists from running for office.

Lam, a former senator who took his present post less than a month ago, called on Secretary General U Thant today after earlier talks with Secretary of State William P. Rogers and foreign ministers of other countries contributing troops in Vietnam. He did not speak in the General Assembly because South Vietnam has only observer status at the United Nations.

The Saigon government is still undecided whether a lull in the fighting over the last few weeks is "a sign of goodwill from Hanoi" or is the result of the September rains, Lam said.

Ducking questions on whether U.S. troops can be withdrawn in the next 2½ years if Communist pressure is not increased, he said Presidents Thieu and Nixon are in full agreement on "the policy of replacement and redeployment" of American forces.

South Vietnamese troops are increasingly taking over the defense task, he explained, but it is still necessary to train them to fight guerrilla actions instead of preparing for conventional warfare.

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